

EUROBAROMETER 66

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

AUTUMN 2006

NATIONAL REPORT

SUMMARY

CROATIA

The present opinion poll was requested and coordinated by the DG Communication.

The present report was made for the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Croatia

The present dossier does not represent the position of the European Commission

The interpretations and opinions hereto expressed are solely that of the author.

Introduction

The Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll is carried out twice a year. The current one, 66th (EB 66) was carried out in the period between 6 September and 10 October 2006 in all 25 European Union Member States, two acceding countries: Bulgaria and Romania, in two Candidate Countries currently in the accession negotiation process: Croatia and Turkey (the opinion poll was not carried out in Macedonia which has not yet been set a date for the opening of accession negotiations), and in the part of Cyprus under Turkish administration. This is the fifth such opinion poll that includes Croatia.

During the half-year period between the two previous Standard Eurobarometer opinion polls, Finland succeeded Austria in assuming the presidency of the European Union.

Croatia opened and provisionally closed the chapter on education and culture in negotiations with the European Union in Brussels on 11 December. With this, Croatia's membership talks were separated from Turkey's negotiations. The chapter on education and culture is the second chapter Croatia has opened and closed since the start of its EU entry talks, after the chapter on science and research, which was opened and provisionally closed on June 12.

The Standard Eurobarometer opinion poll commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General for Communication was carried out by the consortium TNS Opinion & Social, constituted of Taylor Nelson Sofres and EOS Gallup Europe. In Croatia, data were collected by the Puls agency and were treated and reported on by Brussels-based senior correspondent to Večernji list, Stojan de Prato.

1. Opinion climate

On average, Croats are rather satisfied with their way of life (72%), although by 10 percentage points less than the average of citizens in the EU 25 (82%). They are as

satisfied as the Turks and much more satisfied than the Bulgarians and the Romanians. In the EU 25, Hungarians, Portuguese, Lithuanians, Latvians and Greeks are less satisfied than Croats. In the past two years, satisfaction with their way of life has increased by 2 points in Croatia and by one in the EU 25. Among the new Member States, as regards satisfaction, Slovaks too are now ahead of Croats, behind the Poles who were ahead of them in the previous semester. Over the previous semester, satisfaction of all new EU citizens has increased, except for the Hungarians who are 4 percentage points less satisfied.

The majority of both Croats and Europeans do not expect major changes over the next year but do fear a deterioration of the employment situation in their respective countries.

Only one-third of Croats trust the media. While trust in the Croatian media has dropped by two percentage points compared with last autumn, in the EU 25, trust in the media is considerably higher than in Croatia.

On average, national judiciaries are trusted by twice as many Europeans as Croats. Those not trusting the judiciary in Croatia now amount to 70 per cent, 4 percentage points more than last year, despite the fact that the number of unsolved cases has started to decrease.

Religious institutions, along with the army, are alone in enjoying the trust of over half the Croats, although this has declined since last year.

Trust in political parties and all institutions is at its lowest level both in the EU 25 (17%) and in Croatia (7%) where trust has decreased considerably. Trust in the national government also dropped as compared with half year ago. The government of every respective country is now trusted by five percentage points fewer Europeans (30%) and seven percentage points fewer Croats (17%) than half a year ago.

The majority of the EU Member States citizens trust the EU. In Croatia, trust in the EU has decreased by five percentage points (33%).

While six months ago the number of those expecting benefits from EU membership represented the majority in Croatia, their number has now decreased by three percentage points (42%), and is now exceeded by those not expecting benefits whose share increased by four percentage points (46%). In the EU 25, the number of those

not expecting benefits has increased by one percentage point but they represent a considerable minority (34%), while there are over fifty per cent of those who have positive experiences from EU membership (54%).

The majority of Croats still think of unemployment as the biggest difficulty (65%). This is a declining trend. They are now three percentage points below the figure recorded half a year ago, six percentage points less than a year ago and 14 percentage points less than 18 months ago.

Crime is still ranked second and shows a persistently growing trend (50%). It has now been cited by three percentage points more of respondents than half a year ago, eight percentage points more than a year ago and 15 percentage points more than 18 months ago.

2. Economy and employment

Both at European Union level (56%) and in Croatia specifically (55%), respondents do not differ in their expectations regarding the beneficial effects of membership on the economy of their respective countries.

Over half of Europeans feel the beneficial effects of membership on the standard of living (52%). In Croatia, optimists make up a relative majority (48%), but there are six percentage points more pessimists (44%) than in the EU 25.

Almost two-thirds of Europeans are aware that due to EU membership their country has more influence in the world. The greater influence of Croatia upon its accession is also expected by over just half of Croats.

While over half of Europeans (51%) consider EU membership to negatively impact upon employment in their respective countries, more Croats (49%) believe the employment situation will deteriorate upon accession to the EU.

In Croatia, seven percentage points more citizens (68%) expect the EU's single market to positively affect increased competition in national economy, as compared to average expectations of citizens of the EU 25 (61%).

Both in the EU 25 (41%) and in Croatia (44%), the number of citizens who perceive globalisation as a threat outnumbers that of those who see it as a good opportunity.

Improved education and vocational training programmes are ranked first among the measures to further the economy both by Croats and Europeans as a whole. Half of Europeans and 90 per cent of Croats assess the national economic situation as bad.

3. European political union

An average of 54 per cent of Europeans and 50 per cent of Croats are in favour of the European Union becoming a political union, while 30 per cent of Europeans and 37 per cent of Croats are against.

Opponents outnumber supporters in Denmark Austria, Sweden and in Finland (36:50%) and are in the absolute majority in the United Kingdom (31:54%).

Close to two-thirds of Croats are in favour of adopting the Euro as the common currency which is an average a bit higher than that in the EU 25. Support for the CFSP in Croatia (65%) is slightly under the average in the EU 25 (68%).

The vast majority of Croats (71%) and Europeans (75%) favour a common defence and security policy. The Constitution enjoys slightly more support from Croats (57%) than from the citizens of the EU 25 (53%).

4. Enlargement

Europeans are (46%) more in favour of enlargement than against it while almost two-thirds of Croats (64%) support it.

On average, half of European respondents are in favour of Croatia joining the European Union while 36 per cent are against. Support for Croatia joining the EU is now five percentage points lower than half a year ago when only the majority of the citizens of Luxemburg were against. Now the Germans, Italians, Luxemburgish and British are against it, while the Finns are divided.

In Croatia, support for EU membership fell from 74 to 68 per cent over the past year, while the percentage of opponents rose from 18 to 24 per cent.

Croatia is still the fourth most desirable future member state for European respondents, immediately after Switzerland, Norway and Iceland.

Croatia's support to those three countries becoming EU members is even higher than it is for their own country.

Among other Candidate and potential Candidate Countries, only the accession of Bulgaria is supported by a relative majority in the EU 25, while for all other countries, including Romania, opponents represent the majority.

Croatian respondents, on the other hand, support the membership of all Candidate and potential Candidate Countries. Serbia too enjoys more supporters than opponents.

5. The values of European citizens

Peace, human rights, and, in third place, respect for human life are the most important personal values for Croats. European respondents also rank peace first, while respect for human life is second, slightly ahead of human rights. Self-accomplishment and respect for other cultures are twice as important to Europeans as to Croats, while religion for both is close to the bottom of the list of personal values even if slightly more important to the average Croat than to the average European.

For Croats, the most important value of the European Union is the rule of law which also suggests their biggest expectation from EU membership, followed by democracy and human rights. Among the values of the European Union, European respondents rank democracy and human rights in first place, while peace comes in third.

6. Conclusion

While Croats' satisfaction with their way of life continues to increase and fear from unemployment to decrease, trust in the European Union, as well as support for European policies and for Croatia's membership, continues to decrease. However, the majority of Croats expects membership to be beneficial for their country. They support the EU becoming a political union, as well as the adoption of the European Constitution. They are also in favour of adopting the Euro as common currency.

Even if the EU is now slightly less popular than half a year ago, this opinion poll shows that while the answers given by Croats are still heavily influenced by day-to-day factors, the country's long-term orientation remains pro-European.